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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a program initiated by teacher-researchers to increase the use and knowledge of appropriate social skills with junior high school students while working in academic cooperative groups. The target groups comprised sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students in a predominantly middle class community in the Midwest. The students' lack of use or knowledge of the targeted social skills was documented through teacher observation, a teacher constructed pre-survey of the students, and teacher constructed rubrics used during academically challenging group assignments. Analysis of probable cause data indicates that students' lack of knowledge of the use of social skills is linked to changes in societal behaviors, changes in the family structure, and the lack of a caring adult to model appropriate behaviors. Reviews of the curriculum at the targeted school revealed that social skills were being addressed in an Advisory Program, but were not being transformed to other areas of the school. A review of the solution strategies suggested by educational professionals and an analysis of the targeted junior high school setting resulted in the following intervention: directly teaching targeted social skills as part of the curriculum, allowing students time to reflect on the use of social skills through the use of journaling techniques, teacher modeling of the targeted social skills, and student practice of the targeted social skills during academically challenging group assignments. Results of the intervention support the researchers' hypothesis that such intervention increases the use of the targeted skills in the classroom setting. It is noted that the students understood and used the targeted social skills in the classroom; they did not transfer their use to unstructured situations in the building. Appendix A is Parent Letter; Appendix B is Student Survey (Pre- and Post-); Appendix C is Social Skills Rubric; Appendix D is Social Skills Observation Sheet; Appendix E is Rubric Comparison Chart; Appendix F is T-Chart; and Appendix G is Journal Entry Checklist. (Contains 6 tables and 51 references.) (Author/MKA)

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Social Skills and the Junior High School Student

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & IRI/Skylight

Field Based Masters Program

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Abstract

This action research paper describes a program initiated by teacher-researchers for the purpose of increasing the use and knowledge of appropriate social skills with junior high school students while working in academic cooperative groups. The targeted groups consisted of 6th, 7th and 8th grade students in a predominately middle class community in the Midwest. The students' lack of use or knowledge of the targeted social skills was documented through teacher observation, a teacher constructed pre-survey of the students and teacher constructed rubrics used during academically challenging group assignments.

The analysis of probable cause data indicated that students' lack of knowledge of the use of social skills was linked to changes in societal behaviors, changes in the family structure and the lack of a caring adult to model appropriate behaviors. Reviews of the curriculum at the targeted school showed social skills were being addressed in an Advisory Program, but were not being transferred to other areas of the school.

A review of the solution strategies suggested by educational professionals in research articles as well as an analysis of the targeted junior high school setting resulted in the following intervention: directly teaching targeted social skills as part of the curriculum, allowing students time to reflect on the use of social skills through the use of journaling techniques, teacher modeling of the targeted social skills and student practice of the targeted social skills during academically challenging group assignments.

The results of the intervention supported the researchers hypothesis that the intervention would increase the use of the targeted skills in the classroom setting. The researchers noted that while the students understood and used the targeted social skills in the classroom, the transference of using these social skills in unstructured situations elsewhere in the building was not evident.

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Chapter 1

Problem Statement and Context

General Statement of the Problem

Junior high students demonstrate poor social skills when working in groups which interferes with their learning. Evidence for the existence of this problem includes teacher observations, student self-evaluation and assessment of a sampling of challenging student assignments.

Immediate Problem Context

The targeted junior high consists of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students and is located in a suburb approximately thirty miles northwest of Chicago. The total student population is 588 students (285 females and 303 males). The students are from varying backgrounds: 61.7 % Caucasian, 3.9% African-American, 14.3 % Hispanic, 20.1 % Asian/Pacific Islander. The majority of these students come from middle income families, with 20.09 % coming from low-income families. Sixty percent of the students live in single family dwellings with the remaining forty percent living in multiple housing units.

The administrative staff is comprised of one principal, and two assistant principals (one full-time and one who also teaches four classes); each one takes responsibility for one of the three grade levels. There are 54 staff

members; 40 of these are classroom teachers (30 females and 10 males) with 15.2 average years of experience. The special service staff consists of a school nurse, a speech and language therapist, a psychologist, a social worker, a teacher of behaviorally disturbed (BD) students, a resource person for learning disabled (LD) students, and a teacher of at-risk students. These teachers provide special services to 52 students, 42 formally and 8 informally with 4 in transition out of special education. There are not any self-contained LD or BD classes; therefore, all of these students are mainstreamed to some degree.

There is also a Bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) program housed in this junior high. The program has a staff of 3 teachers and 3 teaching assistants. There are 53 boys and 36 girls in the combined programs. Limited English Proficient students comprise 14.1 percent of this school's population.

This school offers many academic and non-academic programs to the student population. Academic programs include math, science, social studies, language arts, reading, foreign language (French or Spanish), and fine arts (band, chorus, music, art, life skills, and industrial technology). Non-academic programs include sports programs (interscholastic and intramural), Art Club, Life Skills Club, Industrial Technology Club, Model Airplane Club, yearbook, cheerleading, pom-pons, Drama Club, Speech and Debate Club, Card Collecting Club, School Store, newspaper, Creative Writing Club, Winter Musical, Spring Musical, Environmental Club, Multi-Media Club,Student Senate, Accelerated Reader Club, National Junior Honor Society, Service Credit System, Peer Mediators, Student of the Month (at each grade level for each subject) and Battle of the Books. The majority are open for all students to join.

The average class size for the sixth grade is 24.1 and eighth grade is 24.9 students. The teaching day is divided into eight 42 minute periods, one 23 minute advisory period, with three minute passing time between periods. The school day begins at 8:25 a.m. and ends at 3:00 p.m. The attendance rate is 94.9% and the mobility rate is 18%.

The school was built in 1972 based on the open classroom philosophy. There are five pods with four classrooms in each pod, a science pod with a storeroom in the middle with four classrooms off each side , an art room, an industrial technology room, a life skills room, two computer labs that are attached to a learning media center, a gym (which can be divided) with a stage, an auditorium, a band room, a multi-purpose room (used for P.E. classes and lunch) and several other smaller rooms which have been created since the opening of the school. In 1978 the physical structure of the school had been altered by installing dividers in each pod to create four separate classrooms. Therefore, some rooms are on the outside and have windows, while others are on the inside and do not contain windows. Due to this set up, in order for the students to enter or exit the outside rooms they must go through the inside rooms. This school does not have any outside property for play areas, but has access to the park across the street.

Description of the Surrounding Community

The community consolidated school district has a population of 5,770 students who attend eleven elementary schools (K-5th grade) and three junior highs (6th-8th grade). It embraces four separate communities which are approximately 30 miles northwest of Chicago.

This particular school's population is mainly from one of the four communities. Its total population is 53, 200. Approximately 20% of

the population is under 18 while fifteen percent is over the age of 65. The median family income is $42,000 and the average home value is listed at $70,000. There are approximately 7500 single-family housing units in the community and approximately 500 multiple-family housing units. The community administration consists of a mayor and six trustees, and is serviced by two park districts. Also included is a large recreational facility that offers many different types of programs to the residents of this community. The area can be described as mainly residential with many franchise businesses and restaurants along the main highway. Industry in this area is considered "light" and "clean". This community was established in 1892, has 16 churches of various denominations, a library, and is fully incorporated.

Figures from the 1990 census are very different from the 1995 estimates. The estimated figures for 1995 list residency at : 40.1 percent Caucasian, 45.5 percent African American, 5.9 percent Hispanic, 1.3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.1 percent Native American, and 2.1 percent listed as Other. The demographics reported were obtained from the 1996-1997 school report card and the local chamber of commerce and industry report.

National Context of the Problem

Bradley W. Rasch states that "The 1990s have been marked by a social void in which we seem incapable of ascribing guilt to anyone" (Rasch, 1997, p. 575). He feels that society as a whole is taking less responsibility and blaming others more, and that behavior is spilling into home and school. Responsible citizenship requires students to have the desire along with the ability to contribute to society in socially useful ways and to conduct themselves in positive social behaviors. Rasch suggests that "Our society not only fails to put appropriate pressure on people to alter negative behaviors, but it fails

particularly during the most crucial time of a human being's life- the early years" (Rasch, 1997,p.576). Three factors that contribute to student 's poor social skills and lack of responsibility are society, the home environment and school.

A measurement of what our society thinks is socially acceptable can be attributed to the media: television, newspapers, magazines and the Internet. Students see what society feels is important by viewing these mediums. Much of what students see on television deals with the problems of society. For example, crime, gangs, language, and violence are depicted in a way that the message conveyed is that these types of activities are proper and favorable actions accepted in our society. Rasch suggests that these messages are very subtle and, "creep into the fabric of popular culture, into our jargon and into our rationales for social relationships and interactions" (Rasch, 1997, p.576). Many of these issues were not even thought of fifteen years ago.

The home is no longer the stable influence it once was. Many families are dual income families where both the mother and the father must have jobs and are out of the house more than eight hours a day. Other homes are single parent homes which require the parent, usually the mother, to work long hours to support the family. Due to the extended period of time parents spend away from the family home, they are too exhausted to pay the amount of attention that a middle school student needs on a daily basis. These parents are overwhelmed and inadequately prepared for parenting. Many of these students are going home to an empty house and are not accountable for their actions due to the lack of parental supervision. No one is at home to supervise them doing their homework, or to share the daily events and activities. No tangible consequences are provided in response to unacceptable behavior. Parents are often defensive about their children's behavior, believing that "boys

will be boys" or that their child is "too young to know any better" in response to others' observations and perceptions. These problems know no racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic lines and are present in suburbs as well as cities.

In schools, "teachers often choose a punishment/reward system (external control) because they believe it teaches students responsibilities" (Nelson, Lott and Glenn, 1997, p.12). However, this system actually makes the teacher responsible, rather than the student. It then becomes the teacher's job to catch the student being either good or bad, and the student's job not to get caught. Alphie Kohn as cited by Nelson, Lott and Glenn believes that the punishment/reward systems have long-term negative results. Behaviors such as "rebellion, the negative use of power, or thoughtless compliance" (Nelson, Lott and Glenn, 1997, p.12) are the result of the punishment/reward system. This type of system does "not teach self-discipline, self-control or any other important characteristics and skills for success in life" (Nelson, Lott and Glenn, 1997, p.12-13).

Middle school students today face challenges that did not exist for middle school students of the past. Society continues to change what it finds acceptable, which causes confusion among students. As they try to fit into society, they are given mixed messages. At school they are told "you must do this or this will happen" while at home there are not clear consequences for their actions. When in society it appears a whole new set of rules apply. "Middle school students are in the middle of childhood and young adulthood. But instead of living between the two they seem to be straddling them. Sometimes they tip more to the side of childhood, at other times to the side of young adulthood" (Hynds, 1995, p.25). Students do not have the skills to sift through all the mixed messages and form good social skills that will lead them

into life. As students grow and begin looking for jobs these skills become more important. Fortune 500 companies, as cited by the Creativity Education Foundation in 1990, list the top five skills these companies find desirable as: teamwork, problem solving skills, interpersonal skills, oral communications and listening. These companies also list computation and reading as twelve and thirteen respectively. Therefore, if students do not learn these desired skills early and practice them throughout their adolescence, they have put themselves at a disadvantage before entering the job force.

Chapter 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the students' ability to recognize and use specified social skills, the teacher-researchers administered a Student Pre-Survey (Appendix B) to the targeted 6th-, 7th- and 8th-grade classes the second week of school. This survey contained questions regarding the appropriate use of each of the targeted social skills: taking turns, doing the fair share of work, working productively in class, working specifically on the assignment, being considerate of others and listening to others. There were three general questions about the individual student that included his or her grade level, sex and overall grade average the previous year. Other questions were about feelings toward school, feelings about other students, feelings about the teachers and questions regarding the student's grouping preference. Each student was asked to respond with often, sometimes or not usually.

The targeted classes consisted of one 6th-grade language arts class, one 7th-grade social studies class and one 8th-grade physical education class. The 6th-grade class had 24 total students, 14 boys and 11 girls, the 7th-grade class had 19 students, 11 boys and 8 girls and the 8th-grade class was an all girls class with 24 students.

Table 1 illustrates the students' "often" responses, listed in percentages. An analysis of the table indicates that the targeted classes knew the appropriate responses for each of the targeted social skills. The sixth grade class was low with only a 2% "often" responses on taking turns, however, the "sometimes" responses were much higher at 76%. This indicates that the students are familiar with this social skill, but are in need of instruction or practice in the use of the skill.

Table 1

Pre-Survey on Students' Perceptions of Social Skills and Attitudes Toward School

Social Skills	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Taking turns	2	68	57
Fair share	76	63	67
Working in class	68	68	51
Work on assignment	56	68	67
Considerate	76	68	67
Listening	96	84	86
Attitudes Toward School	**Grade 6**	**Grade 7**	**Grade 8**
Caring teachers	68	63	42
Comfort level	75	63	57
Group Preferences	**Grade 6**	**Grade 7**	**Grade 8**
Group work	40	10	38
Individual work	24	5	10

Note: Numbers represent percentages of "often" responses

Table 1 also indicates the differences in the students' perceptions of school as they move through the three grade levels. The 6th-grade students scored the highest with 68% and 75% in "often" responses when answering the following two questions: I think most of my teachers care about me and I feel comfortable at school. The eighth grade students responded "often" only 43% and 57% of the time to the same questions. One possible explanation for the difference is in the students schedules. In sixth grade, the targeted students have two teachers for all of their academic classes: science, social studies, language arts, reading, and math, whereas the targeted 8th-grade students could have as many as five teachers for the same academic classes. Another possible explanation is the onset of puberty. As students move through the grades and begin or continue to develop, teachers become less important while their friends become more important which can lead to feelings of discomfort at school and with adults in general.

In addition to the Student Pre-Survey, the teacher-researchers observed the students in a group setting. The students were randomly grouped and given a challenging assignment which required working in groups. The teacher-researchers observed and rated each student individually on his or her use of each of the targeted social skills on the first working day of the assignment. The students were rated on a scale of three, with three being the highest and one being the lowest.

Table 2 illustrates the ratings, listed in percentages, given by grade level. An analysis of the table indicates that the students do not use the targeted social skills appropriately in a group setting. Although in Table 1 the students appeared to know the appropriate answers to give on a survey, in practice they seemed unfamiliar with the correct use which indicates that the students are familiar with each of the social skills, however are unsure of how to implement each correctly during group work.

Table 2

Teacher Observations of Actual Use of Social Skills on Challenging Assignment #1

	Grade 6			Grade 7			Grade 8		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Taking turns	56	44	0	69	31	0	24	76	0
Fair share	60	40	0	11	79	10	52	48	0
Work in class	40	60	0	0	32	68	24	48	28
On assignment	26	74	0	21	74	5	43	57	0
Considerate	18	78	4	43	57	0	5	81	14
Listening	44	56	0	48	52	0	19	67	14

Note: Numbers represent percentages

Table 2 also indicates that as the students move through the grade levels they become more familiar with each of the specified social skills. With a few exceptions the 8th-grade students were rated higher in usage of the skills than the sixth or seventh graders. These ratings indicate that the students have been given some instruction or have used the targeted social skills more often and are more comfortable with them as they move through the grade levels. However, none of the students is constantly high in the usage of these skills.

Table 3 reiterates what was shown in the two previous tables, that is that the students rated themselves much higher in each of the targeted social skills than the teacher-researchers. This again indicates that the students feel they are using each of the skills apporpriately. Table 3 also indicates as students move through the grade

levels they are more aware of each skill and rate themselves lower, which confirms their awareness. Judging by the overall lower ratings, 7th- and 8th-grade students seem to be more aware that their groups are not using the skills.

Table 3

Teacher/Group Rubric Comparison Chart of Assignment #1 - Total Score

	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	Teacher	Group	Teacher	Group	Teacher	Group
17 - 18	0	78	0	16	0	63
15 - 16	5	15	0	66	50	25
13 - 14	62	7	34	16	12	12
11 - 12	31	0	33	0	38	0
0 - 10	4	0	33	0	0	0

Note: Numbers represent percentages

The teacher-researchers have concluded that the targeted 6th-, 7th- and 8th-grade classes are familiar with the specified social skills. However, the students are unable or unsure how to use these skills properly in a group setting. This leads to the conclusion that the students think they are "on target" with their behavior during group work when they are actually ignorant of the application of the skills.

Site-Based Problem Evidence

The targeted junior high school groups of sixth, seventh and eighth graders come to school without the social skills necessary to achieve academically and to work

constructively with others. They seem unsure of how to behave in many situations, often making poor choices and then being unable to accept the consequences. Physically, socially, intellectually and emotionally, the teachers observe that these young adolescents seem to change more dramatically in three years than students of other ages. For one thing, they seem to have more energy than is necessary. Just standing in the hallway when classes change, teachers observe students hurrying from the classrooms, banging their lockers, calling to their friends, pushing, shoving and generally making chaos as they go to their next classes. However,this energy has been observed as unpredictable. The same students who were just causing havoc in the hallway can be seen a few minutes later, sitting at their desks in a near-catatonic state the minute classes begin again.

The junior high school students at the site-based school are very social creatures in the sense that it is often through the support of their peers that they discover and develop their identities. Informal student interviews show that they much prefer the interpretations of behavior from their friends than from their teachers, and they trust their friends' interpretations more. Their social identities are like their moods, and seem to be in a perpetual state of flux; they can be paragons of virtue one moment and devil-demons the next. There seems to be very little consistency.

Students in the targeted group have had to leave the safe, self-contained environment of the elementary school to come to a school where the classes change every forty-five minutes and where the students meet a different teacher and often different classmates throughout the day. They are in the middle of childhood and young adulthood. Sometimes they seem childish and needy and other times they seem adult-like and provocative. They appear very confused about how to act in certain situations, and when in doubt, they act inappropriately

The students have a variety of languages and cultures represented and are aware of social and cultural differences; however, the teacher-researches observed thaat they lack situations that allow them to explore human relationships and cultural perspectives. The curriculum allows few opportunities for discussion of these elements. The targeted junior high school has a steady influx of students from many countries in Europe and Asia, with a few students from Africa, South America and Central America. Each student seems to have a different language and a different culture. This makes the student population interesting to work with and observe, but it causes a certain amount of strain for the teachers. The teachers must continually be aware of these dissimilarities. For example, the teachers must know that reference to or touching a young Muslim girl's headdress is taboo in their culture, or that keeping the head down when chastising a young Mexican-American means no disrespect but quite the opposite, since direct eye contact in their culture means challenging authority.

In the classrooms, the teachers are encountering a degree of diversity in both students' ability levels and their racial, economic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds that is greater than ever previously encountered in their classes. The student demographic shift has certain implications for teacher researchers. Students from linguistic and cultural minority backgrounds are considered to be more at risk for school failure (behavioral and academic) in traditionally structured schools and classrooms.

For many years, it was assumed that students between the ages of ten and fourteen were beginning to move from what Piaget called "concrete operations" into what he called "formal operations"---basically that they could think abstractly about themselves and the world. Through teacher observations and informal student interviews, it has been determined that most middle school students have not yet

moved fully into formal operational thinking as far as modes of behavior are concerned. They choose not to consult with teachers who can help them make concrete connections between abstract ideas and their own personal codes of behavior. The targeted adolescents often believe that all eyes are on them, and have difficulty looking past their own viewpoints.

The targeted adolescents lack the cognitive and emotional equipment to figure out the consequences of doing something that is not right. During informal interviews with the targeted students, the teacher researchers determined that they lack the independent status necessary to decide freely and have not learned how to make correct choices. According to school conferences with parents and teachers, it was noted that some parents not only had no time to supervise their children but they felt they didn't need to do so; they had their own interests. The lack of adult supervision and time spent doing constructive, cooperative activities compounds the effects of other negative influences in the social environment for these students. They are more vulnerable to every social encounter since they do not have the backing of a caring adult, and the students at most risk are those who have accumulated the most developmental risk factors. The social world of students at the site-based school sometimes seems to be poisonous to their development because they have friends ans relaatives who have been involved in using drugs ans in other unlawdul activities, as reported in the local newspaper.

The junior high school students in the targeted groups are intense and because of this they seem to have a powerful need to be at center stage, making sure that others listen to them and see them act, no matter if it is acceptable to others or not. Paradoxically, they seem to need routine, rules and procedures and are frightened and frustrated when they do not have these elements. These things are missing in many of the classrooms at the site-based school. There seems to be no one to show

them how cooperation among students produces a certain comfort level. The targeted sixth, seventh and eighth grade students do not have mentors who will instruct them in how to provide the leadership, communication, trust, decision-making and conflict management required for learning groups to be effective.

Unfortunately, there are many issues that face the junior high school student at the site-based school. There are parental substance abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence and neglect that affects the intellectual and emotional capacities of the students. Even though the population is mostly middle class or lower middle class, the effect is the same as if it were in the ghettos of an urban setting. Having the opportunity to cooperate with classmates does not guarantee that students will be competent in doing so. Misbehavior on the buses and misbehavior reported by the crossing guards at the school show this to be true.

There is also a great deal of media openness that the targeted groups witness which treats virginity as a social disease, which promotes materialism and makes a life of crime seem like a viable occupation. Furthermore, the school nurse at the site-based school relates that these middle school students are reaching puberty earlier than students did at the turn of the century. Many of them are experimenting with issues and experiences that were once considered unlikely and unimagined.

The young adolescents at the targeted school do not seem to be an integral part of the community. Years ago the site-based school area was mostly farms and small towns. The young people worked on farms or in the town when they weren't in school. Today, although they may be loved, they aren't really needed or wanted for much of anything, certainly not for economic survival. The targeted junior high school students have become bored and alienated. They have become consumers of mindless diversions, sometimes causing disturbances at nearby fast-food chains and restaurants on school holidays, most notably on teacher institute days. They seem to

be trying to think of ways to create chaos or to gain a little attention from others, hoping from these actions to know they are at least visible and noticed.

The students at the site-based school have personal and sensitive issues and generally no way of dealing with them. One reason they cannot deal with their angst is that they need the help of their teachers to assist them in feeling integral and involved, and sometimes that help is not forthcoming. Nor do they seem to be able to work collaboratively with their classmates, moving beyond their own perspectives and considering the viewpoints of others. There is a missing sense of classroom community at the site-based school.

More students are coming to the targeted school in need of special education because of poor parenting, the result of parents' drug use or trauma at birth according to records accompanying their registration. Modern medicine is able to save babies born too soon or with obvious birth defects whereas in the past the baby would not survive. The result is that there are more students at the school today in need of the attention of specialists than ever before. Much of the focus is on behavioral disorders. Because of the attention focused on the needy student, the average student is sometimes ignored or seems to become part of the woodwork.

The site-based school often assigns a teacher's aide to oversee learning-disabled groups, but the regular classroom teacher has to handle the classroom. Due to mainstreaming and inclusion of these special education students in a regular classroom, the classroom teacher may find the classes disrupted; many of the learning-disabled students have serious behavior problems. This keeps the rest of the classroom entertained, confused or enraged depending on the personality of the classmate. In any case, the teachers report that the targeted groups are witness to unacceptable behaviors and to their teachers needing to cope with the situation.

As a result of ability grouping in the site-based school, some of the lower

achievers or average achievers do not have the brighter or more dependable student to emulate. In the days of the one room schoolhouse, there was always a higher class or an older student in the room that kept the others in line, or at least showed them how to behave. The method of segregation according to academic ability is a kind of inbreeding that produces an inferior product. There seems to be too much interest-group politics to change the situation at the site-based school.

Segregating students by ability, known as "tracking" or "ability grouping" is practiced in at least 80% of U.S. high schools, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Unfortunately, junior high schools and middle schools are "wannabes" and do the same thing. The teachers at the site-based school complain, when this is mentioned, that the curriculum would be "dumbed down" if the site-based school no longer grouped according to ability.

Some children at the site-based school live with a single parent and have low economic status. The rise at the school in the number of students diagnosed as having mild disabilities is not surprising since their records show lack of medication or medical treatment at crucial intervals of their development along with possible nutritional deprivation. Many of these students are showing signs of serious behavior and academic problems and need more than the usual classroom teacher to help them.

Every teacher is in awe of the potential of the human being to grow and learn. To move from a dependent child to an independent adult is a process in which teachers play an important role. The students at the site-based school do not have the "problem-solving" skills and attitudes that are helpful in the transformation process; they do not seem to have teachers who will help them generate their own solutions to misbehavior. There is considerable evidence that is dismissed about the efficacy of students working in cooperative learning groups to realize specific social skills.

Interpersonal competition and individualistic learning are emphasized at the targeted school which leads away from group learning and interaction which would be an educational enhancement. Research shows group learning, or cooperative learning, is advantageous when schools want to emphasize achievement and higher level reasoning processes and is also true when schools wish to emphasize cognitive and social development.

Literature Review

"To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society" (Theodore Roosevelt, as cited by Lickona, 1993, p. 6). It is time for educators, teachers and parents to realize that students will continue to resort to socially negative behavior unless their education is founded on moral principles (Fields, 1994). Students in the targeted groups come to school knowing too few of the social skills needed to be able to work consistently and cooperatively with others, to be able to stay in situations until they have satisfactory solutions, to be able to solve problems successfully and to be able to experience and participate in friendship. Too many students do not know how to conduct themselves from the point of view of right and wrong; too many seem unconcerned about the rightness or wrongness of an action.

Today's youth need social and emotional learning opportunities. Both the education and business sectors have identified this need. A U. S. Department of Labor report (1991) lists interpersonal skills as essential for high school graduates if they are to succeed in finding meaningful work (Cummings & Haggerty, 1997). In a report given The Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, U. S. Department of Labor Chairperson William Brock stated, "What we found is that we're not preparing our children for the world of work." In its report, this commission identified a foundation of skills and qualities designed to support workplace competencies. Among the skills

listed were self-esteem, integrity, responsibility, self-management, communication and listening skills, decision making and problem solving (Siccone & Canfield, 1993).

According to Lickona, by the age of 16, the average child will have witnessed 200,000 acts of violence and by the age of 18, that child will have witnessed approximately 40,000 sexually titillating scenes. Money increasingly drives our society and shapes the goals of our youth; making money becomes the justification for breaking rules. "Young people are easily seduced by a material culture that promotes instant gratification" (Berreth and Berman, 1997, p. 24).

The family has changed as well. The family, extended and nuclear, once took responsibility for the moral education of the child. Now with the disappearance of parental involvement, schools need to become moral arbitrators. "America desperately needs to recover the purpose of education, which is to provide for the intellectual and moral education of the young" (Bennett, 1994, p. 202). If educators are silent on moral issues, that means only that the other voices still have exclusive call on children's minds (Etipioni, 1998, p. 446).

The change in family life in the last 20 years has contributed to the lack of social skills students demonstrate in the classroom. "The family, traditionally a child's primary moral teacher, is for vast numbers of children today failing to perform that role, thus creating a moral vacuum." (Lickona,1993 p.31). One of two U. S. marriages ends in divorce. Up to 60 percent of America's children spend their childhood in a single-parent home (Lickona, 1993). Many parents over schedule themselves and their children to the point where parent-child face-to-face communication nearly disappears. When children don't have a close relationship with their parents, they are more vulnerable to peer pressure (Lickona, 1991).

As the family has changed, so have the neighborhoods. In the past, a neighborhood was the section of a community where everyone knew each other,

looked out for one another and kept an eye on all children. Neighbors were an extension of the family and kept track of any children in the area. For example, if a child was not behaving appropriately, a neighbor would contact the parent, or, in some instances, reprimand the child on the spot even before contacting the parent. Today, with dual income families, single parent families and blended families, people do not have the time, inclination or opportunity to know each other or each other's children. Children do not have the same sense of community that the children of twenty years ago had. A neighborhood is just the place the child lives; it is no longer a safety zone or the place where a child can play or explore with innocence. Therefore, children are not receiving positive feedback or given opportunities to practice using good social skills in other circumstances. If children are not using appropriate behaviors in their community, schools cannot expect children to demonstrate appropriate skills at school.

Society continues to change what it finds as acceptable behavior. The world today no longer has clear-cut moral values, and children's perceptions of socially appropriate behavior are skewed. The most basic kinds of moral knowledge seem to be disappearing from our common culture. Many feel the media is largely responsible for this change. Students are watching more television shows and videos that depict declining morals. Many children growing up in this kind of media culture are stunted in their moral judgment (Lickona, 1993).

Today the media plays a large role in children's lives. Children are watching more and more television, as well as playing video games or being on-line in chat rooms more than they are playing with their friends or interacting with another person. Due to the availability of these different aspects of the media, children are learning about issues in elementary school or middle school that only concerned their parents in high school or college. Parents now need to educate themselves about the rating of each of their child's television shows, CDs or video games, having to decide if it is

suitable for the child. These ratings are used to ir form interested persons of the content of the television show, the movie, the lyrics of the CD or the graphics of a video game. Everything seems to have a rating, simply because it is necessary. In the past, if there was any doubt that a child should not watch a certain television show, it was not produced or it was changed so that it was appropriate. Today there are several different ratings to indicate everything from inappropriate language to sexually explicit content and violence. Television shows using these ratings as warnings are aired in prime time on regular TV. The unattended child or the ignored child has ample opportunity to view these shows. Children are getting the message that if these types of behaviors are on TV then that behavior is appropriate.

Social change had been building slowly in the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1960s it accelerated dramatically. In the 1960s and the 1970s, personalism spawned a new selfishness. Looking Out for Number 1 became a best seller. "You can have it all" guided popular thinking about the pursuit of happiness. There was a new breed of parents, ones who considered self-fulfillment more important than the old parental ethic of self-denial and sacrifice. The sexual revolution elevated short-term gratification above values of restraint and long-term commitment (Lickona, 1991).

We can view the discipline problem in historical perspective. The revolution in classroom discipline swept American schools between 1935 and 1955. This was as inevitable as it was necessary. Teacher-pupil relationships had to be brought into closer alignment with the general spirit of equality in American society. A more desirable balance had to be developed between the actual dependence of the child on adult direction and the child's realistic capacities for exercising self-direction and self-discipline. American schools seemed to go too far in correcting the balance of power. It seems we went too far in overdoing the permissiveness and in cutting back adult control and guidance; more seriously, however, were the consequences of

taking away certain other traditional values such as courtesy and respect for rightful authority (Ausubel, 1961).

A generation ago, American public schools began to walk away from their role as moral educators. Schools feared they would be accused of imposing religion or indoctrinating children, so they stuck to academics, leaving moral instruction to parents and the community. Many children of the 1960s and the 1970s grew up believing that there are no universal values (Smith, 1989). School administrators were unhappy about the situation and parents wanted them to get back to teaching right from wrong.

It may have been out of a legitimate concern for the separation of church and state that the order was given to take the Ten Commandments from the classroom wall, to forbid the reading of psalms and the recitation of prayer, but the abandonment of repetitious moral teaching coincided with the breakdown of family life, where moral teaching had always taken place. "Only the truly dense would call this coincidence" (Fields, 1994, p. 40).

One cause for students' lack of interpersonal relationships and being responsible for the actions they choose to exhibit are the lack of adults and peers modeling caring behavior. Morally and culturally, caring is a belief about how we should view and interact with others. In this way, caring is essential to education and may guide the ways we instruct and discipline students, set policy and organize the school day. Caring is an essential factor in the development of a positives relationship between students and their teachers. Instruction, discipline, classroom organization and all other aspects of classroom work are based on a foundation of caring (Noblit, Rogers & McCadden, 1995). Meeting children's needs requires "turning schools into caring communities" (Kohn, as cited by Lickona, 1998, p.449).

Caring relationships are not a priority in the hierarchy of curricular and policy concerns in our schools. They are devalued because their true value is difficult for

those outside of particular relationships to understand. But caring requires educators and parents to think about teaching and school in unaccustomed ways (Noblit, Rogers & McCadden, 1995). If caring is to become an integral part of schooling, we must create more opportunities for caring to occur and break the "audible silence" around it, as cited by Noblit, Rogers & McCadden, 1995, p. 687).

Reducing the size of schools and classrooms would allow teachers to get to know their students individually, to help them more with their work, to become involved with their extracurricular activities and to interact with families (Bosworth, 1995). Teachers and students were constructing caring relationships long before intellectuals realized the importance to humans of making connections with others (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden,1995).

However, there are too many missed opportunities for the demonstration of caring. There are too many classes in which teachers rarely smile, say anything positive to a student or use the student's name other than for a reprimand. Changes in these behaviors might go a long way toward promoting caring and need not detract from the pursuit of academic goals (Bosworth, 1995). The caring teacher first provides good explanations and then seeks to clarify misunderstandings.

Some teachers do not respond to students appropriately nor do they respect students' thoughts and feelings by taking them seriously. Teachers have the power to affect the values and character of the young in at least three ways: 1. Teachers can serve as effective caregivers by loving and respecting their students, helping them succeed in school, building self-esteem and enabling them to experience what morality is by having the teacher treat them in a moral way. 2. Teachers can serve as models of ethical persons who demonstrate a high level of respect and responsibility both inside and outside the classroom. They can also model moral concern and moral reasoning by their reactions to morally significant events in the life of the school and in

the world at large. 3. Teachers can serve as ethical mentors by providing moral instruction and guidance through explanation, classroom discussion, storytelling, personal encouragement and corrective feedback when students hurt others or themselves (Lickona, 1991). Teachers are the most important contributing factors to the realization of a vision of creating learning environments that emphasize possibilities not disabilities (Canfield and Siccone, 1993).

There may be teachers who do not value pupils positively, do not perceive their attitudes accurately and behave in ways conducive to negative reactions. Behavior in any situation is a function of one's perception of the situation. The appropriateness of the behavior will depend, at least in part, on the correctness or accuracy of the perceptions. The motivational system of the person will determine the ends to which his perceptions are used (Gage and Suci, 1951).

Horace Mann, the founder of public education in the U.S. believed that "moral education is a primal necessity of social existence. The unrestrained passions of men are not only homicidal, but suicidal." Mann hoped to form a literate, diligent, productive and responsible citizenry committed to the conception that the best society was one in which people governed themselves through elected officials and representative institutions (Benninga & Wynne, 1998). We know that teaching social and emotional skills can have a long-term positive effect on academic achievements (Elias et al., as cited by Cummings and Haggerty, 1997).

Daniel Goleman, in Emotional Intelligence (1995), argues that a high IQ is not a major predictor of success in life. Rather, he says, emotional intelligence (self-awareness, mood management, self-motivation, impulse control and people skills) is more important. The W. T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (1992) notes that teachers who use social skills curriculums are more satisfied with their classes and with teaching in general than teachers who do

not (Cummings & Haggerty, 1997). Students have a better chance to learn social and emotional skills when teachers give these skills the same intense instructional focus that they give academic subjects (Cummings & Haggerty, 1997).

A good school, like a good class, is run by someone with vision, passion and compassion. A good school prepares its students not just for the SATS or ACTS but also for the world out there (Time, Oct. 27, 1997, p. 64). Encouraging and empowering teachers seems the best place to start since teachers are the most important contributing factors to the realization of a vision of creating learning environments that emphasize possibilities (Canfield & Siccone, 1993). "The pendulum is swinging back from the romantic idea that all societal values are oppressive. But educators went along with all this craziness, so we've ended up with students who are ethically illiterate" (Honig, as cited by Lickona, 1993, p. 6).

Social problems in America are constantly increasing. Young adolescents face a turbulent world filled with choices which are difficult even for mature adults. Instead of having years of experience to draw from, these young people are making critical decisions while coping with the greatest physical and emotional changes of their lives. Developmentally, these decisions and changes come at the very time young adolescents are attempting to break away from home and establish peer relationships to which they will look for acceptance. The media is bombarding the child with messages of sedition and there is no one at home to care. Young people are easily seduced a by a material culture that promotes instant gratification and the violence they see around them desensitizes them to their own pain or that of others. The crisis is a moral one, a devaluation of life at every level of experience that affects our children as they grow and develop. Students have a better chance to learn social and emotional skills when teachers give these skills the same intense instructional focus that they give academic subjects. Young people will begin to see that their actions

and choices create the world as it is and as it will be.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

"Down through history, education has had two great goals: to help people become smart and to help people become good" (Lickona, 1993, p. 7). A review of the literature on incorporating social skills at the junior high level revealed various solutions to the problem of students' inability to demonstrate appropriate social skills while working in groups on academic assignments. The researchers found that cooperative learning, positive/cooperative discipline, direct teaching of social skills in the classroom and a positive/caring classroom climate using specific strategies are all possible ways of increasing the use of appropriate social skills during group work.

One possible solution is the use of formal cooperative learning. The cooperative learning process inherently facilitates the teaching of thinking skills while at the same time teaching students social skills. Because responsibility and respect are thought of as higher level thinking skills, cooperative learning is indicated as a means of achieving this result (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991). "Cooperative learning teaches values and academics in a single stroke" (Lickona, 1991, p.39). Johnson and Johnson, Slavin, Kagan, Sharan and Sharan and others have repeatedly supported this principle with research. It can be argued that all sense of social obligation is learned in a group setting or it has no meaning (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991).

Cooperative learning is used when students are grouped together, usually in groups of two to five; each student is given a job he or she must complete in order for the group to be successful on a specific academic task. Smaller groups promote students to interact with one another on a deeper level. Classrooms that do not engage in smaller group instruction allow the most articulate and confident students to control the discussion. Smaller groups allow students to receive more attention and more time

to share their ideas (Canfield and Siccone, 1993). Students work to promote problem-solving skills and the ability to see other points of view. One of the salient features of collaboration is sharing, a component pivotal to collaboration (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995).

Cooperative learning "increases students' regard for one another, for classmates similar to themselves as well as classmates of different ethnicity or gender or achievement level or who are disabled" (Cohen, Farivar, Johnson and Johnson, Solomon and Slavin as cited by Farivar and Webb, 1994, p. 51). Students benefit academically as well as socially when using cooperative learning, therefore, cooperative learning is a key instructional strategy when teaching social skills. "This type of learning environment organization has resulted in impressive student achievement and positive social values and behavior" (Leming, 1993, p.66). Teachers must pay as much attention to group process and group dynamics as to content. By creating interdependence and an incentive to help, cooperative learning promotes prosocial behavior (Kohn, 1991).

Vygotsky lends psychological support for cooperative learning as a way of developing thinking skills as well as social skills. He states, "Every function in...cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later on the individual level; first between people and then inside." This applies equally to attention, to memory and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991). Most students respond to the informal or formal social skills woven into the classroom expectations, roles and guidelines. Many require more formal direction in acquiring cooperative social skills.

"Educators who use this research-based model (cooperative learning) will put into practice an effective method of instruction for teaching academics and social skills, as well as democratic values (Dishon and O'Leary, 1984). Research shows that the

consistent use of cooperative teaching methods in the classroom helps students to learn and to care about others. Students learn to not only tolerate individual differences but to value them as well. Teachers have been using group methods as long as there have been classrooms. However, the teacher's success depends on the use of specific skills which can be taught and learned; knowledge and practice are needed. A powerful source of energy comes when groups of individuals can share their experiences and talents and focus them in a problem-solving mode (Campbell, 1994).

Another possible way of increasing the application of appropriate social skills to academic learning is the use of positive discipline. "Positive discipline [is] using positive reinforcements to teach children responsible behaviors" (Shandler, 1996). The primary basis for this strategy is a problem solving approach. As problems arise in the classroom, those who implement this strategy, tackle them from the positive rather than the negative angle. For example, instead of focusing on the negative behavior a teacher would compliment another student's good behavior. Public praise inspires other students; when they hear how good they are, they start doing even better (Pardini, Pride & Seline, 1998). Specific praise helps students know exactly the kind of action, activity or accomplishment to perform again (Williams, B., 1996). Students have a right to know where they stand with the teacher.

> To develop self-discipline, children need structures and limits with clear consequences to guide their behavior. We enhance students' ownership and sense of responsibility when we include children in the development of rules and consequences. Beginning at the preschool level, we can teach and use conflict management and mediation skills and use discipline problems and conflict as opportunities to enhance students' social skills (Berreth and Berman, 1994, p. 26).

"If you punish a child for being naughty, and reward him for being good, he will

do right merely for the sake of the reward; and when he goes out into the world and finds that goodness is not always rewarded, nor wickedness always punished, he will grow into a man who only thinks about how he may get on in the world, and does right or wrong according as to how he finds either of advantage to himself" (Kant, as cited by Kohn, 1998, p. 456). Children make good decisions by making decisions. Schools ought to involve students as active participants in decision making at the classroom level and at the total school level. Extrinsic motivators (such as rewards to instill virtue) has to do with controlling behavior instead of instilling sound values. According to control theory, discipline problems do not occur in classrooms in which students' needs are satisfied (Gough, 1995). These needs are the psychological needs of love, power, freedom and fun and take precedence over survival needs, which most students in their families or surroundings are able to satisfy (Glasser, 1987).

As students develop self-discipline, their confidence level rises and their social skills improve (Berreth & Berman, 1994). One way to incorporate positive discipline into the classroom is to hold class meetings and discussions. Students want their actions and efforts to make a difference. The possibility that the student's own efforts could really transform something is deeply powerful (Williams, B., 1996). Meetings can take place regularly and also when a need arises. The goal of a class meeting is to

> foster all three parts of character--habits of moral judgment , feeling and behavior--through the continuing challenge of putting respect and responsibility into practice in everyday classroom life [and] to create a moral community as a support structure to nurture and hold in place the qualities of good character that students are developing (Lickona, 1991, p. 139).

Class meetings improve social skills by allowing students to be responsible for the rules as well as the consequences. Students thus learn to communicate with one another and gain empathy for each other (Lickona, 1991). Positive discipline has an ultimate

goal of preparing citizens who can help build a just and caring society.

Positive discipline techniques may help students change their locus of control and may assist students to become reflective and responsible for their own learning and behavior. The locus of control construct is said to have originated with Rotter's (1996) social learning theory, which suggests that students attribute their successes and failures to different sources. People with an internal locus of control accept responsibility for the consequences of their behavior. Those with an internal locus of control may have "emotional intelligence" (Time, October, 1995). People with an external locus of control blame fate, chance, other individuals or task difficulty for their successes and failures (Chandler, 1975, cited by Richardson and Morgan, 1997). Internal locus of control can be built by teachers minimizing anxiety over possible failure by building patterns of success for each student in the class. Precisely because students are constantly controlled by their beliefs, they can learn to override their self-defeating beliefs through the use of affirmations and transform their internal experience of themselves (Canfield, 1993). One of the most important classroom strategies for helping students develop an internal locus of control is to have them practice decision making whenever possible.

Questioning in the affective domain is another way of using positive discipline to help students. Affective teaching is that which brings about an emotional response or change in the learner, helping the learner with social skills or interacting productively with others. Questions in the affective domain provide linkage among emotions, attitudes and thought or knowledge (Richardson and Morgan, 1997). The teacher can provide this association by basing all questions in a lesson on "feelings" and by asking that all responses be based on "feelings". Students will be better able to identify their own feelings if they are asked to respond to certain situations in certain ways. Some students do not know what feelings are; but they rarely achieve without having a

positive attitude and the strong emotions of belonging and caring for other students and teachers. "Teachers in every content area must be aware of the importance of the smile, the kind remark. They should try to structure positive experiences as an integral part of the daily instruction" (Richardson and Morgan, 1997, p. 51).

A third possible solution to the dilemma of the junior high school student not having appropriate social skills in the school environment is to directly teach social skills. We know that teaching social skills can have a long-term positive effect on academic achievement and students' self-esteem. Students have a better chance to learn social and emotional skills when teachers give these skills the same intense instructional focus that they give academic subjects (Cummings and Haggerty, 1997, p. 30). "Schools cannot assume that the language, concepts, behaviors, and skills of good character are written into the gender code" (Brooks & Kann, 1993, p.20). In order for the students to display appropriate behaviors in the classroom, the skills must be taught and practiced just like any other skill. It is not assumed students know all the skills required in a math class, therefore, the same assumption can not be made for social skills (Brooks and Kahn, 1993). The teacher's role in promoting responsibility can best be described as leadership rather than management. Management is an attempt to control people from the outside. Leadership seeks to empower people to manage themselves from within.

The consensus is that traits--and to some degree virtues---are not innate. They must be acquired through learning and practice. They must be transmitted to be internalized. A student's state of mind is relevant to this process. Students do not behave solely according to a set of principles or rules without understanding them (Benninga and Wynne, 1998). The people surrounding the students, the good or bad examples they provide, and the expectations that they establish, are the environments necessary for character development. Participants in the renaissance of moral

education seem to share the sentiments of California Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig. In addition to helping students develop their scholastic aptitudes, he argues that "we must also encourage the full flowering of each child's humanity. Not every child is going to be smart, but every child has the potential to be good" (as cited by Smith, 1989, p. 32).

Bellanca and Fogarty (1991) document five stages for teaching social skills in the classroom: 1) hook lessons to lay the ground work, 2) teach the skills, 3) allow for practice of skills, 4) observe students' practicing, 5) reward groups for using appropriate social skills. There are many ways to incorporate these stages into the classroom. One possible strategy is reflection through journaling. "Moral reflection is necessary to develop the cognitive side of character--- the important part of our moral selves that enables us to make moral judgments about our own behavior and that of others" (Lickona, 1991, p.229). Teachers must understand the stages of moral reasoning, how these stages affect student behavior and how to stimulate moral development by means of discussion, role playing, problem solving and other structured opportunities for taking the perspective of others (Lickona, 1998).

"Social skills do not develop for the class as a whole without deliberate, specific and repeated attention to them" (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991, p. 50). For example, it is necessary to discuss not only the specific skills, but also how to disagree with ideas not people, reaching consensus and arbitrating controversy. However, it is important to remember that social skills need to be reinforced continuously in order for students to use them in the classroom. Social skills are not to be thought of as mastered (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991). "Each skill is meant to be modeled, practiced, and used throughout the students' time in the classroom" (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991, p. 50). If time is not taken to adhere to reinforcement of these skills, it is very difficult for students to proceed in their education to learn higher level skills (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991).

No one can assume that responsibility, cooperation and caring just bloom in the classroom. Without turning students into reward junkies, teachers must provide options for making each student a partner with the teacher, ensuring that all have an equal chance to learn (Bellanca, 1992). In their work, Johnson and Johnson and Bellanca and Fogarty describe the importance of teaching social skills. Teachers should teach specific social skills so students are aware of what behaviors are expected from them (Burke, 1992).

A fourth solution to the problem of students' inability to demonstrate appropriate social skills while working in groups on academic assignments might be to use an advisory program in the school. This program works to achieve a fostering, caring classroom climate, thus teaching students social skills needed in the educational environment. Student achievement rises when students have a more personal, caring relationship with an adult in an intimate group setting while still being part of a larger school community (Andrews and Stern, 1992). "Any response to a stimulus that evokes feelings or emotions is said to be a part of the affective domain of learning" (Richardson and Morgan, p. 29). Teachers who believe in the ideal that students will thrive with individual adult attention, even for a short period of time each day, have come to embrace this strategy. They feel that increased self-esteem, higher levels of achievement and decreased discipline referrals will be the result.

Eichhorn (1996) in The Middle School emphasized the need for small, personalized school within a school programs; Wiles and Bondi in The Essential Middle School (1981) echo the importance of an advisory-type program with small adult-student ratio; Turning Points (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) attests to the importance of this program as well. All of these sources agree--- youngsters need to have a transition between the self-contained, "safe" environment of the elementary school and the more anonymous, multi-changing periods of the high

school (Andrews and Stern, 1992).

The function of the advisory groups is to promote students' educational, personal and social development. The curriculum is often described as a guidance characteristic, emphasizing issues of personal and social importance to students, including gender issues, career concerns, and problem-solving and conflict-mediation strategies. As a route to both more motivated students and more student-centered teachers, advisory programs have been described as central to effective middle and secondary schools. Thus, Turning Points, (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) recommends that middle grade schools assign an adult advisor to each student.

> Every student needs at least one thoughtful adult who has the time and takes the trouble to talk with the student about academic matters, personal problems, and the importance of performing well in middle grade school. (as cited by Ziegler & Mulhall, 1994, p. 42).

Advisory programs give students extensive social support and frequent opportunities to discuss topics that are meaningful to them. The relationships formed in the advisory group include both adult/student bonds and student/student bonds, both of which are essential to young adolescents. In groups, students get the opportunity to get to know classmates they might never befriend under ordinary circumstances (Farivar and Webb, 1994). The advisory group setting gives the opportunity for personal growth and trust in a situation where, even though the curriculum may not be "academic", the setting is in school.

The implementation of an advisory program requires reorganizing the school to ensure adequate time for teachers to work with students and also to plan together with colleagues. Teachers must see themselves as not only curators of knowledge, but also as facilitators of learning. An advisory program is primarily about a change in the roles

of teachers and students and secondarily about change in content. Teamwork is essential in the process change, as colleagues work together to establish common goals and effective practices and problem-solving skills (Johnson and Johnson; Kanter as cited by Ziegler and Mulhall, 1994).

All investigation done by the researchers showed that for effective character education, the school must be a caring community (Lickona, 1991). No matter which strategy is used, or in which combinations these strategies are used, making connections between teachers and students and between students and students is at the heart of a meaningful, non-alienating school experience. Evidence suggests that these connections have the potential to increase student motivation and to lower absence and drop-out rates. No one program can satisfy the needs of all schools or even all grades within a school. Each school must devise its own program around certain general requirements. Teachers must feel total commitment to any caring program if they are to be successful.

Teachers have the power to affect the values and character of the young. Teachers can serve as effective caregivers by loving and respecting their students, helping them succeed in school, building self-esteem and enabling them to experience what morality is by treating them in a moral way. They can serve as models of ethical persons who demonstrate a high level of respect and responsibility both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers can also model concern and moral reasoning by their reactions to morally significant events in the life of the school and in the world at large. They can serve as ethical mentors by providing moral instruction and guidance through explanation, classroom discussion, storytelling, personal encouragement and corrective feedback when students hurt others or themselves (Lickona, 1991). Teachers are the most important contributing factors to the realization of a vision of creating learning environments that emphasize possibilities and not disabilities (Canfield and Siccone,

1993).

Developmentally, critical decisions and physical and emotional changes come at the very time young adolescents are attempting to break away from home and establish peer relationships to which they will look for acceptance (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development; Lounsbury and Clark; George, as cited by Ayres, 1994). At school, instead of having a single teacher to whom a student can turn for guidance and stability, the youngster often faces six or more teachers, none of whom may know him or his family well (Epstein and MacIver, as cited by Ayres, 1994). A caring program provides the opportunity to make positive connections between adults and young people at school and at home in ways which are genuinely educational and community enhancing (Ziegler and Mulhall, 1994). Every classroom represents the possibility of creating a society in which everyone is esteemed, everyone accepts responsibility for themselves and each other and everyone experiences success and happiness (Siccone and Canfield, 1993).

Discipline serves four important functions in the training of the young. First, it is necessary for socialization. Second, it is necessary for acquiring adult personality traits such as dependability, self-reliance, self-control, persistence and the ability to tolerate frustration. Third, it is necessary for the development of conscience. Lastly, discipline is necessary for children's emotional security. Without discipline, too great a burden is placed on the child's limited capacity for self-control (Raths, Pancella, Van Ness, 1967). Positive discipline is needed because we want students to work with us and to cooperate with us. That is when learning can take place, when the classroom management is such that children are free to learn, free from disruptive behavior and free from their own inability to control their own impulses. A well-managed classroom lets the business of learning receive full attention.

"Education worthy of its name is essentially education of character," the

philosopher Martin Buber told a gathering of teachers in 1939. He meant that the very profession of teaching calls on us to try to produce not merely good learners but good people (Kohn, 1991). It is possible to integrate prosocial lessons into the regular curriculum; as long as children are learning to read and spell and think critically, they may as well learn with texts that encourage perspective-taking. The development of the capacity to imagine how someone else thinks, feels or sees the world tends to promote cognitive problem solving (Kohn, 1991).

In summary, the research literature has suggested several options for helping junior high school students become more adept at using appropriate social skills while working in groups on academic assignments. Students have a better chance to learn social and emotional skills when teachers give these skills the same intense instructional focus that they give academic subjects. Cooperative learning (involving small groups of students working on a common task), augmenting positive/cooperative discipline where-in the students are directly involved in decisions, applying direct teaching of social skills in the classroom and creating positive/caring classroom climates using specific strategies were some of the methods investigated. Due to the characteristics of the targeted sixth, seventh and eighth grade students and their needs, the interventions that will be implemented are direct teaching of social skills through cooperative learning, creating positive/caring classroom climates and assessing students' progress through the use of journaling techniques. Our research reveals that students need an awareness in them of desirable behavior, they need to understand how to develop the skills that are necessary to utilize this behavior and they need caring classrooms to implement the knowledge that caring is a value and is a belief about how we should view and interact with others.

An anonymous sage wrote, "When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost."

Project Objectives and Processes

After reviewing and researching literature on incorporating social skills at the junior high school level with students while working in academic groups, the researchers created the following project objective:

> As a result of emphasis placed on the direct teaching of social skills through the use of journaling and challenging group assignments, during the period of September, 1998, to December, 1998, the 6th, 7th and 8th grade students from the targeted classes will improve the use of targeted social skills and thus increase their capacity to improve academic performance.

In order to accomplish this project objective, the following processes and procedures were necessary:

1. Obtain classroom materials in order to directly teach targeted social skills.
2. Reorganize current curriculum to incorporate the direct teaching of targeted social skills.
3. Develop learning activities and assessments that allow students to practice social skills in a small group setting.

Action Plan

After reviewing possible solutions to the problem of students' inability to demonstrate appropriate social skills while working in groups on academic assignments, the researchers chose to implement the following interventions: cooperative learning, direct teaching of the targeted social skills and allowing for practice on assignments of each of the skills. The dates during which the activities were implemented are from August 31, 1998, to December 18, 1998

Week 1 (August 31-September 4)
Parent letter sent home (Appendix A)

Week 2 (September 7-11)
Student Pre-Survey (Appendix B)

Week 3 and 4 (September 14-25)
Challenging Group Assignment #1
Random grouping
Rubric for social skills (Appendix C)
September 15 first observation (Appendix D)
Rubric Comparison Chart (Appendix E)

Week 5 (September 28-October 2)
Skill: Taking Turns
Using the T Chart (Appendix F)
Journal Entry
1. Before: I think taking turns while working in groups means...
2. After: I can improve on taking turns by doing the following...
Students were required to write at least three sentences.

Week 6 (October 5-9)
Practice the Taking Turns skill in small groups during the week (short assignments)
Skill: Fair Share of Work
Student-created Web
Journal Entry
It is important for each group member to do his/her fair share of work because...(must use at least three sentences)

Week 7 (October 13-16)
Practice Fair Share of Work skill in groups during the week (short assignments)
Skill: Working in Class Productively
Pros and Cons Chart
Journal Entry
The three most important "pros" for working in class productively are...
These are important because...

Week 8 (October 19-23)
Practice Working in Class Productively during the week (short assignments)
Skill: Working on Assignment in Class
Looks Like/Sounds Like Chart

Journal Entry
Three good reasons to work on the assignment given are...
These are important because...

Week 9 (October 26-30)
Practice Working on Assignment in Class in groups during the week (short assignments)
Skill: Being Considerate (Being Nice)
What It Is, What It Isn't Chart
Journal Entry
My group decided being considerate is...
My group decided being considerate isn't...

Week 10 (November 2-6)
Practice being considerate in groups during the week (short assignments)
Skill: Listening to Others
Class discussion and student created role playing
Journal Entry
My group chose the scenario...
This demonstrated Listening to Others because...

Week 11-13 (November 9-25)
Skills Review: Group discussions, role playing, vocabulary
Exercises and final group game on skills (application and definition)
Week 14-15 (November 30-December 11)
Challenging group assignment #2
Same groups as assignment #1
Rubric for social skills
December I: first observation
Rubric Comparison Chart

Week 16 (December 14-18)
Student Post-Survey (Appendix B)

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the interventions with the targeted students, challenging group assignments were given and rubrics developed by the researchers were marked to assess the assimilation and use of the targeted social skills. In addition to the previously mentioned means of assessment, student journals were kept

throughout the intervention. These journals were an on-going assessment of the insight students were developing and a check of misunderstood terms or vocabulary. A post survey was also used to assess the students' progress in knowledge and use of the targeted social skills.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Results

The objective of this project was to improve students' ability to demonstrate appropriate social skills while working in groups on academic assignments. The targeted classrooms were comprised of three junior high school classes: one sixth grade language arts class, one seventh grade social studies class and one eighth grade physical education class. Interventions implementing the direct teaching of social skills using cooperative learning techniques and student journaling were selected to effect the desired changes.

The teaching of cooperative learning social skills occurred at the beginning of the intervention because the researchers determined these skills needed to be taught prior to students working in base groups. The direct teaching of social skills included taking turns, doing the fair share of work, working productively in class, working specifically on the assignment, being considerate of others and listening to others.

A parent letter (Appendix A) was sent home the first week of school informing the parents/and or guardians that the teacher-researchers were researching the possibility of directly teaching their sons and daughters appropriate social skills while working academically in cooperative learning groups. The parents were unanimously in favor of this. Many asked interested questions when they came to school for conferences. Some doubted that their children could be taught certain social skills since at home they displayed an alarming ignorance of such basic ideas.

The first phase of the action plan, which was followed as written in chapter three, was to collect data to determine which social skills the students were cognizant of and which skills they practiced. This was accomplished by giving the participants a student pre-survey (Appendix B) the second week of school. The researchers noted that there seemed to be a discrepancy between knowledge and use.

The second step was to use a Social Skills Rubric (Appendix C) developed by the researchers. This indicated the areas students needed to work on to further develop appropriate social skills in an academic setting. This was used after the first direct teaching of social skills involving a challenging academic assignment. The rubric showed actual demonstration of the desired social skills as opposed to the student survey which tended to show which skills the students thought the teacher wanted to see.

The third phase of the intervention involved using Social Skill Use Observation Sheets (Appendix D) while the students were involved in classroom assignments. This was an on-going observation of the students to see if they were aware of and practicing the desired social skills. Points were given according to teacher observation. This was then shared with the students so that they would know if they were developing their awareness of appropriate social skills thus using them in an academic setting. This was important to the students because they were evaluated according to their actual demonstration.

Each week, for six consecutive weeks, the teacher-researchers focused on a different social skill and directly taught this skill to the class. For example, the concept of taking turns was taught using The Looks Like/Sounds Like Chart (Appendix F). The same strategy was used to help the students understand why working in class productively with others is a desirable skill. This kind of instruction was used for all the directly-taught social skills throughout the intervention. The students worked in cooperative groups of three or four. Students remained in the same groups for the entire study to complete the assignment for each skill. The skill that required the most focus during the intervention was the ability to "listen to others".

After the students were made aware of each skill they practiced using that skill in their groups on an academic assignment the following week. Each assignment took

an average of one class period. For example, the 6th-grade language arts class was studying parts of speech. In order to help the students understand how to use the taking turns skills correctly, the teacher gave each group one marker, and asked the students to create a web for nouns. The teacher reminded the students that each child must listen to the others in order complete the web appropriately and not repeat any information. The person with the marker cap was the one who was allowed to speak and give his or her idea. That person could then decide whether or not he/she wanted to write on the actual web. Once that person had contributed an idea, the cap was passed on to the next student and so on around the group. This limited the talking in the group and allowed each child, loud or quiet, to have a turn contributing to the assignment. Each idea was listened to, thus structuring a learning situation in which the students invested themselves in each other's learning.

An example of a practice assignment for the 7th grade social studies class was similar. However, the students were practicing the targeted skill of taking turns in an academic setting rather than the listening skill. The students were each given a different color marker and asked to create a chart depicting the settlers of the New World. They quickly realized that the teacher would know which student didn't take a turn because the marker color would not appear on the paper. This created a situation in which each student was encouraged to contribute, whether he or she wanted to or not. The teacher-researcher noted that the students were supportive of all the ideas manifested in the group; it didn't seem to matter which child had the original idea. The group maintained itself as a positive, effective unit.

The 8th grade physical education weekly practice assignment for example, was for the targeted skill of being considerate of others' ideas. The students were working on team building activities and were required to brainstorm possible solutions with each other prior to attempting them. The teacher gave each group one stick for each

member of the group. As the students gave their ideas to solve the problem each picked up a stick. Once everyone had a stick and had contributed an idea, each member was then allowed to evaluate each solution one at a time, pointing out reasons why she thought an idea would or would not work. After everyone had expressed an opinion, the group created a solution to see if it would work. Many found that by discussing the merits of the varied solutions they were able to appreciate each other's contribution and create a workable solution. Several students made the observation that had they not been required to be considerate of each person's ideas while evaluating them, they may never have discovered the solution that worked. The students related appropriately to one another and found that there are skills which they must learn in order to work cooperatively with their peers.

Along with the weekly academic practicing of each skill, each group completed two challenging group assignments. These assignments were group projects taking five to ten class periods to complete and requiring the students to use all the targeted skills to successfully complete the assignment. The students received two grades for these assignments: an academic grade and a social skills grade (Appendix C). The first assignment was given before any of the targeted skills were taught. This was used as baseline data, and gave the teacher-researchers a perception of where each student was in terms of using each skill. The second assignment was given after the students had been taught and had practiced each of the targeted skills.

The 6th grade language arts class was presented with their second challenging assignment by being directed to create a Parts of Speech Book. The students were required to create a book for each of the parts of speech. The groups were stipulated to create a cover and complete requirements for illustrating each part of speech. Examples of the different parts of speech, sentences using each one correctly and pictures representing or illustrating them were included in the book. These books

were then photocopied and bound so that every student could take a book home.

The 7th grade social studies class's second challenging assignment was to create a class map of the United States. Each group randomly chose a region of the United States from a hat. Groups then drew the states in that region and labeled the names of the states, the year the states entered the union, the state capitals, crops grown, important industries, places of geographic interest and possible entertainment interest (i. e., Disney World), although it was noted that most notable entertainment interests were industries. The regions were then taped together to create one class map.

The 8th grade physical education class was given a second challenging assignment that required the students to create an aerobics routine. The teacher-researcher chose a song during which each group performed a five minute routine. The students were required to include stretching, exercises for each large muscle group and a cool down section in their routine. Each group then performed their completed routine for the class. Positive interdependence was shown when each group member recognized and valued their dependence on one another.

An on-going activity was that each student involved in the project kept a journal in which they wrote their thoughts and ideas and actual happenings as they practiced and became aware of certain social skills. The teachers read these individually with the students, sharing with the class only when the student wished to do so. This became a means of checking to see if the student understood the social skill and if the student felt it was a necessary and desirable objective. These journals were used to record information about the steps they followed to greater understanding. They also served as a good reference tool when the students were asked to choose an appropriate strategy in group learning.

The project culminated in December, 1998, with a post-survey (Appendix B)

given to all students who had been involved in the intervention. There were rather dramatic results showing the gains students had made in realizing appropriate social skills. It was interesting to read one eighth grade student's journal in which he wrote:

"I have never thought it was important to listen to another student. I mean, I know I'm supposed to listen to the teacher. Sometimes I pretend. But I never really thought I should listen to another student. Now I understand why I should."

Growth could be shown from reading student journals from earlier in the year. A seventh-grader wrote:

"I already know these 'social skills' my teacher is talking about. I just haven't used them. Everyone knows that you don't really need to. I don't see why I have to, but if I get a grade for using them I guess I'll try."

From a sixth-grader at the beginning of the year came: "I'll never be able to do this. Sixth grade is hard enough without my teacher wanting me to learn social skills. I don't like this."

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Cooperative learning was an essential element in the teacher-researchers' intervention because cooperative learning is based upon a belief that the ability to work effectively in a group is determined by the acquisition of specific social skills. These social skills can be taught and can be learned. This happens by the teacher defining, discussing, observing and processing with the students.

In order to assess the effects of directly teaching the targeted social skills, student journals were used for self-evaluation and understanding. Challenging group assignments were given to the participating students so that they would become aware of the desired social skills and be able to practice them. A post-survey (Appendix B) was given to all the students. The results of the post-survey showed that the students were able to reiterate what was taught to them in class designating the

Table 4

Pre and Post Survey on Students' Perceptions of Social Skills and Attitudes Toward School

Social Skills	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Taking turns	2	56	68	72	57	64
Fair share	76	84	63	70	67	78
Working in class	68	81	68	82	51	58
Work on assignment	56	72	68	71	67	70
Considerate	76	85	68	82	67	75
Listening	96	98	84	91	86	90

Attitudes Toward School	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Caring teachers	68	75	63	73	42	50
Comfort level	75	82	63	75	57	60

Group Preferences	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Group work	40	57	10	62	38	49
Individual work	24	15	5	5	10	3

Note: Numbers represent percentages of "often" responses

targeted social skills. As shown in Table 4, each grade level made a gain in their "often" responses to each social skill. The largest gain was made by the sixth grade class. It is surmised that this may be because the sixth grade students have not previously been taught these skills, or it may be that they were unaware that practice of these skills is a necessary and continuing ability while working together in groups. It appears that the results came about because the students were made aware of the correct use of social skills when the teacher-researchers used descriptive praise, which describes the behaviors as well as their effect, rather than evaluative praise which gives no specifics in terms of appropriate behavior. Once students got used to descriptive praise, they were able to use it in a long term benefit of self-approval, not compelled to look to the teacher for measures of their success.

The seventh and eighth grade classes also showed substantial gains, but not as great as those of the sixth grade class. It is speculated that this may indicate seventh and eighth graders were already more conscious of the targeted social skills simply by having lived longer and knew that adults are pleased when these are practiced. The teachers also surmised that the students had begun to understand the importance of their behaviors during group work. The students saw that the teachers felt these behaviors were so important that they looked and listened for them during work time. The students also benefited from actual data about the frequency of appropriate behavior. One student wrote in his journal: "These social skills are hard to remember. I'd rather just do the work than worrie (sic) about social skills. But Mrs. ____ said she didn't see me doing my fare (sic) share of work yesterday. I was tired."

An assessment tool that was used frequently was the teacher-researcher observations made of students using each targeted social skill in group settings. On the first day of a challenging group assignment, the teacher-researchers observed and then rated each student on each of the designated social skills. Table 5 shows that

Table 5

Teacher Observations of Actual Use of Social Skills on Challenging Assignment #1 & #2

Assignment #1	Grade 6			Grade 7			Grade 8		
Level of performance	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Taking turns	56	44	0	69	31	0	24	76	0
Fair share	60	40	0	11	79	10	52	48	0
Work in class	40	60	0	0	32	68	24	48	28
On assignment	26	74	0	21	74	5	43	57	0
Considerate	18	78	4	43	57	0	5	81	14
Listening	44	56	0	48	52	0	19	67	14

Assignment #2	Grade 6			Grade 7			Grade 8		
Level of performance	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Taking turns	0	39	61	0	52	48	0	30	70
Fair share	5	20	75	2	26	72	7	20	73
Work in class	0	37	63	0	19	81	0	55	45
On assignment	3	29	68	2	22	74	5	55	40
Considerate	0	25	75	0	42	58	0	35	65
Listening	0	20	80	0	47	53	2	39	59

Note: Numbers represent percentages of student scores

each grade level made progress from the first observation and was able to use the targeted social skills in a group setting.

Many students in all three grade levels rated a "3" on the second observation. Only a few, however, were given a rating this high during the first observations. In order for a student to receive a three on the observation chart the teacher-reseacher had to note that the student used the targeted skills most of the observation period. A two rating indicated frequent use of the skill and a one rating was given when the student rarely used the targeted skill during the observation period.

The teacher-researchers observed students talking to one another more, using more encouraging words and sharing materials more often. The teachers felt a more caring and sharing environment had been created. One thing essential for maximum results is the strategy of processing after a cooperative group lesson. Processing is a procedure by which students examined how they practiced social skills, how they could use them more effectively next time, as well as where else in their lives these skills might be helpful. It was found that processing on a consistent basis increased the use of positive group behaviors and also decreased the number of times social skills had to be practiced before they became integrated into the groups' behavior pattern. It was hoped that by doing this there would be an increase in the likelihood that the social skills will become automatic in the students' lives. Lamentably, later observations by other teachers in other parts of the school building indicate that this was not the case.

It is speculated that one reason for the dramatic gain in the sixth grade listening skill, which went from 0 to 80, was possibly due to the students noticing the teacher observing them. The students were actually assigned social skills to practice and listening was one of them. The teacher also scheduled time for processing in order to give the students the opportunity to learn from their group experiences. Sixth graders

are generally eager to please, especially at the beginning of the school year when this research began. If the teacher indicated that a certain behavior was desired, most of the students would probably try to exhibit it to receive the teacher's commendation.

The gain in the fair share skill in seventh grade which went from 10 to 72 was thought to be because of the group composition which included all cultures and ability levels in the room. The teacher felt that positive interdependence was gained when each student felt that what he had to offer was important to the group. The students felt an ownership for their success or failure as a group and seemed more likely to do what was necessary to continue this feeling. The teacher made the students more aware of this by defining and telling the rationale for the fair share skill. The teacher then described how to perform the skill so there would be no misunderstandings among the group members. It is hypothesized that this helped the students make the large gain shown on the chart.

The eighth grade gain of 0 to 73 for the taking turns skill may be due to several factors. Again, it seems the most important factor was that the teacher was observing for this skill and made the students aware that this was important. It is also speculated that because eighth graders are notoriously self-centered, they had not realized there was such a thing as taking turns. Some of the students seem to believe that it's "survival of the fittest" and the fittest don't take turns. The teacher noted that the students who were in sports understood the taking turns skill better than some of the others, probably because taking turns is so important to certain games. What seemed amazing was the fact that the students had not made the transference to other aspects of their lives and in the classroom during academic activities.

An additional assessment tool was the use of a rubric (Appendix C) which included the targeted social skills as well as the academic focus of the challenging assignment. This assessment showed that students at all three grade levels improved

Table 6

Teacher/Group Rubric Comparison Chart of Assignment #1 & #2 - Total Score

	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
Assignment #1	Teacher	Group	Teacher	Group	Teacher	Group
17 - 18	0	78	0	16	0	63
15 - 16	5	15	0	66	50	25
13 - 14	62	7	34	16	12	12
11 - 12	31	0	33	0	38	0
0 - 10	4	0	33	0	0	0

	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
Assignment #2	Teacher	Group	Teacher	Group	Teacher	Group
17 - 18	75	80	87	90	70	75
15 - 16	20	15	11	8	23	7
13 - 14	5	5	2	2	5	0
11 - 12	0	0	0	0	2	0
0 - 10	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note: Numbers represent percentages of student scores in each number band.

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in their ability to recognize and use the targeted social skills in a group setting. Table 6 shows that not only were the students able to use each skill appropriately in a group setting, they were also better able to judge their group use of each skill. On the first assignment, the majority of the students rated their group use of the targeted social skill in the 17-18 range or the 15-16 range with none believing their group performed at the 11-12 range. The teacher-researchers' ratings,however, were very different, rating few groups at the higher levels. On the second assignment, the teacher-researchers and the students were considerably closer in their ratings of performance of the targeted social skills. This probably indicates that the students became more aware of what was expected in each situation pertaining to the desired social skills.

It is hypothesized that the students and the teachers became more acclimated to one another by the students receiving feedback on performance of the social skills. The students understood what the teachers wanted them to do. Just as all students are not on the same level when doing independent work, they were not on the same level when doing cooperative work. The teachers and the students identified and learned specific social skills necessary for cooperative learning. Processing sessions helped groups refine and assimilate these social skills and positive interdependence techniques provided motivation for students to work effectively in groups.

After each skill was taught, the students wrote about their thoughts and their understanding of the skill in journals. Teachers gave a sentence starter to focus the students and start their writing. Many students found this difficult to do at first. The sixth graders, especially, seemed overwhelmed because many of them were not used to writing in journals on a daily basis or at all. At first, most of the students just "spit back" what was said in class, while others took time to reflect on what had been learned. As time passed, the students at each grade level seemed to use these journal entries as the teacher-researchers had intended, as a way to reflect on what

was learned as well as a way to create understanding of the targeted skills. Some even noted that the ability to work effectively in a group is determined by the acquisition of specific social skills.

Positive results were noted, affirming the teacher-researchers' premise that direct teaching of social skills would improve the knowledge and attitudes of students while interacting in academic situations. Classes used in the study were able to use each skill and to explain why each skill is important in group work to obtain optimum results. Increased knowledge was demonstrated through improved thinking skills and the formulation of thoughtful questions. The classes that did not participate in the study were not able to process the same information to the same degree.

Taking the time to teach the students the targeted social skills,however, made group work more enjoyable for the teachers as well as the students. Students were able to concentrate on the academic aspects of the group work when they are able to use the targeted skills appropriately. All three grade levels noticed an increase in the students' academic grades on the second challenging assignment. The students may have become more aware of what was expected of them and were therefore able to solve their problems more efficiently using the targeted skills.

It was learned that skills of cooperation needed to be learned and practiced just as math facts and basal words are learned and practiced. The skills needed to be taught step by step, looking at social skills and why they are necessary. Considered attention had to be paid to which skills to use when beginning cooperative groups and how to progress in the use of those skills. The researchers outlined the steps necessary to teach social skills as well as the procedure for observing how often students used them.

An increase in knowledge of social skills was exhibited through surveys, observations, rubrics and journaling. The post-survey supported the teacher-

researchers' contention that students would have increased knowledge. The rubrics affirmed an increase in knowledge and understanding. Journaling allowed students to write personal reflections of what they learned from a particular activity. The writing in the journals demonstrated a deeper understanding of the desired social skills than had been previously observed.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on improving students' knowledge and use of targeted social skills, the students showed marked growth in both knowledge and the application and utilization of these skills. The use of cooperative groups provided the necessary structure for the researchers' activities. Post-observation results also indicated that substantial gains had been made in improving the targeted students' awareness of appropriate social skills.

Continued effort should be put forth on these skills. For instance, students need to be aware that all students are capable of understanding, learning and performing leadership tasks. Experience and research show that when all group members are expected to be involved and are given leadership responsibilities, we increase the likelihood that each member will be an active participant who is able to initiate leadership when appropriate.

The teacher-researchers found that they had to redefine the word "mistake". Webster's definition is "a wrong action or statement proceeding from faulty judgment, inadequate knowledge or inattention." The teachers added the following phrase to this definition: "...that indicates that more practice is needed and more skill lessons are necessary before mastery occurs." If the teachers' believed that making mistakes showed that students had not yet learned all the necessary skills, then they would probably look at mistakes as data (Dishon and O'Leary, 1984). When students made mistakes working in groups, the teachers continued to give them chances to practice.

It has been suggested to teachers over and over again that one of their most important jobs was to meet the needs of the child. Just how this was to be done was left for the individual teacher to discover. Before one could meet the needs of the child, though, it was necessary to be able to identify some of those needs. It was also clear that some kind of systematic procedure had to be developed for teaching procedures once the needs had been identified.

The teacher-researchers feel that one of the needs of the child is to know how to live productively and cooperatively in a more and more crowded world. One of the procedures to help make this happen is to directly teach and practice the social skills needed in this circumstance. Certainly the taking of turns, doing the fair share of work, working productively with others, being considerate of others and listening to others must be part of the process. Behavior in any situation is a function of one's perception of the situation. If students can perceive that their own best interests lie in cooperation, then they may internalize these behaviors. It can be hoped.

It was found that the most effective student groups were those which were heterogeneous. Groups which included students with different social and cultural backgrounds, skill levels, physical capabilities and gender mirror the real world of encountering, accepting, appreciating and celebrating differences. It seemed that in these instances, real learning was taking place.

The groups learned that they needed to recognize and value their dependence upon one another. Students who have had lots of practice working individually to complete their assignments or competitively to do better than their peers are often not initially eager to work with others. Incorporating positive interdependence increased the likelihood that students would work cooperatively. The students who had worked alone before, had to see that working together produced better results.

The researchers found that student groups were more likely to attempt

resolution of their problems if they were not rescued by the teacher. When students resolved their problems with a minimum of teacher input, they became more autonomous and self-sufficient. Typically, because teachers are members of a helping profession, they intervene to help students. Teachers try to convince students to finish a task; teachers settle students' arguments; teachers offer their solutions to students' problems. As a result, teachers deny the students the opportunity to learn from failure and from each other. No wonder teachers are so tired at the end of the day.

The teacher-researchers found that unless a group overstepped the boundaries of acceptable behavior or made a group decision to solicit teacher assistance, it was more helpful for the teacher to suggest and prompt rather than direct student activity. The teacher's role was better as an observer and monitor. For example, in one group, the teacher removed herself from direct participation in the group work. While she encouraged the group to explore solutions, she did not intervene with solutions of her own.

For educators desiring to implement a program directly teaching targeted social skills while interacting in small group cooperative learning, the teacher-researchers recommend carefully organizing and specifically teaching cooperative learning skills. Of utmost importance is organization. Teachers must begin immediately when the school year starts and they must be thorough. Planning ahead involves first determining activities to be used for each directly taught social skill. It is very important to teach and continue to teach cooperative learning skills. The researchers found that this foundation provides the key to achieving a successful interactive program.

The researchers found that some students wished to work alone because they had been trained that way (Dishon and O'Leary, 1984). Teachers have taught students to "Keep your eyes on your own work," "Don't tell your answer to anyone," and that "Sharing your solution is cheating". Students have successfully learned to

operate from such a perspective. The re-teaching of these students involved a conscious and continuous effort to structure reasons for students to work together. It required positive interdependence. Students in a cooperative group succeeded only if every member of the group succeeded.

The instructors chose to learn to use descriptive praise rather than evaluative praise. Evaluative praise seemed to create dependency on the teacher and detracted from autonomous group work. Descriptive praise described desirable behavior and specifically named their effect on the group work. Such phrases as, "I saw people listening to one another" were used rather than the generic "Group two did a good job." This seemed to result in a long term benefit because students became their own sources of approval. This helped the students trust their own opinions, especially if the opinions were expressed using the targeted social skills. Sharing with the class the appropriate behaviors that were observed helped them understand the importance of learning these behaviors.

The use of these skills helped students feel better about themselves, each other and the group. Without these behaviors, a group single-mindedly completes the task with little acknowledgement of the individuals involved. Without such caring, groups rarely enjoy the process or want to continue meeting on a regular basis. Social skills are those specific behaviors performed by all group members which help the group complete the task and like each other when the task is finished.

Both task and maintenance skills were necessary for groups to work effectively. If a group completed the task, but none of the members ever wanted to see or work with the others again, then it was not a successful encounter. If, on the other hand, a group had a wonderful time and everyone felt cared for and respected but the task was not completed, then that was not a successful group either. The goal of teaching social skills became the creation of groups which consisted of positive, on-task

students who enjoyed their time together, cared about each other and produced high quality work.

The teacher-researchers strongly recommend the direct teaching of social skills needed in academic learning using cooperative learning techniques. It is believed that the teacher's success depends upon the use of specific skills which can be taught and learned. Knowledge of the required skills and practice using these skills are needed. The skills necessary to work in groups are the same from preschool through graduate school. It is only the vocabulary that changes.

The researchers have noticed and experienced for themselves that being an adolescent is a painful experience for many. Children enter adolescence and they are suddenly no longer interested in being "good". Obedience, winning the approval of their teachers, is no longer their highest value. Adolescents do a lot of foolish things, sometimes hurting themselves or others, in the process of showing off how free of rules they can be. If they can become convinced that social skills are important, and that these skills can be used to guide them when they themselves do not know where they are going, then their passage through adolescence might be a little easier.

Biologist Lewis Thomas has written that nature's great law for all living things is not survival of the fittest but the principle of cooperation. An Egyptian magistrate wrote in 2400 B. C. to his son, "Take counsel with the ignorant as well as the wise, for the limits of proficiency cannot be reached and no person is ever fully skilled." An advantage of cooperative learning is an increase in the understanding of ideas; with two people the chances are that one of them will understand something that confuses the other. Rarely, outside of school settings, does one find solitary attempts at understanding.

The teachers-researchers found that a synergistic environment can result in a group of ordinary people producing extraordinary results. Synergy is a form of energy

in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Historically, teachers have learned that some of the most significant learning comes in situations where students collectively solved problems, invented things and produced their own learning environment. Every teacher is in awe of the potential of the human being to grow and to learn.

One disappointment was that the teacher-researchers had hoped for more transference of the use of the targeted social skills outside the classrooms where they had been taught. While in the classroom, the students were able to "tell the teacher what she wanted to hear" and were able to demonstrate each skill in the class, but some of the students seemed unable or unwilling to use the targeted skills in other classes with other teachers. In unstructured areas of the school building, such as in the lunch room or at basketball games in the gym, the students were not practicing the desired social skills.

The rationales cited here are some of the reasons why the researchers decided that cooperative learning groups would be the suitable way to directly teach needed social skills to junior high school students. The results have been convincing and the teacher-researchers would urge others interested in this type of intervention to undertake an intercession of their own. The benefits are greater achievement motivation, more positive attitudes toward learning, more constructive relationships among students, higher level reasoning processes, higher self-esteem and greater inter-personal competencies.

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Appendices

August 1998

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your child's class has been selected to participate in an Action Research Project from September to January, in conjunction with IRI Skylight and St. Xavier University. The researchers, Ms. Getz, Mrs. LaBahn, and Mrs. Regan, are studying social skills at the middle school level. Your child will be learning about the use of targeted social skills in the classroom environment. If you have any questions please feel free to contact any of the researchers. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Helle Getz

Joyce LaBahn

Kathleen Regan

Student Survey

Directions: Answer the following questions by checking the appropriate answer. Most questions ask you to check **Often**, **Sometimes** or **Not usually**

1. I am . . . _____Male _____Female
2. Last year my overall grade average was. . . _____A _____B _____C _____D
3. I am in grade. . . _____6 _____7 _____8

	O	S	N
4. I think most of the people in my school are friendly to one another			
5. I think most of my teachers care about me			
6. I feel comfortable at school			
7. I like to work in groups			
8. I like to work alone			
When working in groups:			
9. I like to do all the work			
10. I like someone else to do the work			
11. I like to share the work			
12. I feel comfortable taking turns with each member of my group			
13. I feel frustrated when I have to wait to talk			
14. I like when teachers give us time in class to work as a group			
15. I prefer to take my part of the work home to do instead of working in class			
16. When teachers give time to work in groups I prefer to do something else			
17. When teachers give time to work in groups I usually work on the assignment given			
18. I think it is important to be considerate to the members of my group, even if he/she is not my friend			
19. I think it is easy to listen to others			
20. I think other people's opinions are important			
21. I think it is important to share ideas before making decisions			

Social Skills Rubric

CRITERIA	One (1)	Two (2)	Three (3)	SCORE
Fair share of work	A few members contributed to the assignment only 1 or 2 in a hands on way	All members contributed to the assignment only a few in a hands on way	All members contributed to the assignment in a hands on way	
Taking turns	A few members took their turn working on the assignment	Most members took their turn working on the assignment	All members took their turn at working on the assignment	
Working or assignment	The group used little of the class time available to complete assignment	The group used most of the class time available to complete assignment	The group used all class time available to complete assignment	
Working in Class on assignment	The group worked very little in class to complete assignment	The group worked in class most of the time to complete assignment	The group worked in class to complete assignment	
Being considerate to other members of the group	Some of the time members were considerate of the other members	Most of the time members were considerate of the other members	All of the time members were considerate of the other members	
Listening to other members ideas	Some of the group listened to each other before making a decision	Most of the group listened to each other before making a decision	All members listened to the other members ideas before making a decision	

Scale:

A = 18-17
B = 16-15
C = 14-13
D = 12-11
F = 10 or below

Social Skills Total _____

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Appendix D
Social Skills Observation Sheet

Social Skill Usage
Observation Sheet

Activity:_____ **Date:**_____

Name	Cooperation with members of group		On task in group		Respecting members of group	
	Taking Turns	Fair Share	Working in class	Working on assignment	Considerate	Listening

Appendix E
Rubric Comparison Chart

Rubric Comparison Chart
Teacher/Group Evaluation

Group:	Cooperation with members of group				On task in group				Respecting members of group			
	Taking Turns		Fair Share		Working in class		Working on assignment		Considerate		Listening	
	T	G	T	G	T	G	T	G	T	G	T	G
Assign. 1: 18 pts Total: _____												
Assign. 2: 18 pts Total: _____												
Group:	T	G	T	G	T	G	T	G	T	G	T	G
Assign. 1: 18 pts Total: _____												
Assign. 2: 18 pts Total: _____												
Group:	T	G	T	G	T	G	T	G	T	G	T	G
Assign. 1: 18 pts Total: _____												
Assign. 2: 18 pts Total: _____												

KEY

T= Teacher Evaluation G= Group Evaluation

THE T-CHART

Topic: _____

Looks Like	Sounds Like

Appendix G
Journal Entry Checklist

SOCIAL SKILLS JOURNAL ENTRY CHECKLIST

		Taking turns	Doing the fair share of work	Working in class	Working on Assignment	Cooperating with others	Listening to others
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							
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27							

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KEY

3 = On target--Student understands and/or has mastered skill
2 = Getting there--Student has an understanding of parts of the skill
1 = Not yet--Student still needs to work on skill